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EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' and teachers' perceptions of self-assessment and teacher feedback in foreign language teaching in general upper secondary education – A case study in Finland

Toni Mäkipää^{1*}

Abstract: This qualitative case study examined how foreign language teachers in Finnish general upper secondary schools enhance self-regulated learning (SRL) with self-assessment and teacher feedback. Nine students and ten teachers from six schools were interviewed, and the data were analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that self-assessment is used in courses but not extensively, and most teachers do not teach their students to self-assess their learning. Most students consider teacher feedback to be useful, but they reported a lack of oral feedback. The participants expressed contradictory perceptions regarding their motivation, as students do not find teacher feedback to be motivating, while teachers believe their feedback is motivating. To a certain extent, teachers enhance SRL with self-assessment and feedback, but their practices could be improved.

Subjects: Language Teaching & Learning; General Language Reference; Languages of Scandinavia

Keywords: self-regulated learning; self-assessment; feedback; general upper secondary education

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr Toni Mäkipää is a doctoral student at the university of Helsinki. His doctoral research focuses on assessment practices in general upper secondary education, and particularly on feedback in foreign language teaching. Mäkipää is a teacher of English, Swedish, and French and has extensive experience in teaching Swedish and French at junior high school and pedagogy for future language teachers at the university level. His professional and research interests include foreign language teaching, summative assessment, formative assessment, assessment literacy, feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, self-regulated learning, metacognitive awareness, quantitative and qualitative research methods.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Teacher feedback and self-assessment are pivotal tools for every language teacher. With teacher feedback, students receive valuable information on their learning and progress in terms of their learning goals. By employing self-assessment, students contemplate their strengths and weaknesses and ponder their learning. Teacher feedback and self-assessment stimulate self-regulated learning, which is a focal learning outcome in all education. To advance and deepen the interconnectedness of teacher feedback, self-assessment and self-regulated learning in the field of language teaching, the present study will be of interest to policymakers, teachers, and scholars. The main aim of this qualitative case study was to discern how foreign language teachers enhance self-regulated learning with teacher feedback and self-assessment.

1. Introduction

This paper explores how self-regulated learning (henceforth SRL) is enhanced with self-assessment and teacher feedback in foreign language courses in Finnish general upper secondary education. The current core curriculum for general upper secondary education in Finland (FNBE, 2016) advocates students becoming independent life-long learners. Students are expected to oversee their learning and consequently become self-regulated learners. In addition, teachers are expected to provide multifaceted feedback to their students in every course and teach self-assessment skills. These ambitious goals are also manifested in the upcoming core curriculum (FNBE, 2019). Feedback and self-assessment are fundamental elements of SRL (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), and SRL is a vital skill in today's world (Bjork et al., 2013; European Council, 2018). It is also the ultimate goal of education (Bandura, 1993), and teachers play an important role when students become self-regulated learners (van der Schaaf et al., 2013).

After basic education, which lasts for nine years in Finland, students usually continue in either vocational education or general upper secondary education. Finnish and Swedish are the national languages of Finland, and every student studies both these languages at school, either as a native language or as a second language. Students must also study at least one foreign language. Students in general upper secondary education must complete at least 75 courses. Regarding languages, students who have Finnish as their mother tongue customarily complete six mandatory courses in English (A syllabus) and five mandatory courses (B syllabus) in Swedish. Schools also usually provide optional language courses, such as French, German, Spanish, and Russian, and some schools specialize in teaching foreign languages. However, the number of students studying optional languages has decreased over the years in Finland: 1,862 students participated in the French test in the matriculation examination in 2012, while only 1,162 participated in the equivalent test in 2020 (Matriculation Examination Board, 2021).

Internationally, several studies examining SRL in foreign language teaching and learning have been conducted. Bai and Wang (2020) investigated the relationship between growth mindset, self-efficacy, and intrinsic value in SRL in studying English. They discovered that having a growth mindset is a strong predictor of SRL. Xiao and Yang (2019), in turn, discovered that SRL can be enhanced with formative assessment, and feedback at the process and self-regulation levels benefits learners the most. Regarding SRL strategies, Kim et al. (2015) found that diligent students often mentioned using SRL strategies. In the Finnish context, SRL has been studied from several perspectives, such as the relationship between emojis and SRL (Oinas et al., 2020), pupils' readiness for SRL (Metsärinne et al., 2015) and disciplinary and gender differences in SRL strategies (Virtanen & Nevgi, 2010). Additionally, previous research has shown that many Finnish students start their university path with inadequate learning strategies and have poor skills for regulating their learning (Lonka & Lindblom-Ylänne, 1996; Virtanen et al., 2013).

No research so far has investigated how teachers enhance SRL in foreign language teaching in Finland, and more research is needed to examine the relationship between formative assessment and SRL (Panadero et al., 2018) as the knowledge of the relationship between formative assessment and SRL is limited (Meusen-Beekman et al., 2015). Additionally, a considerable amount of research has been published on SRL since the 1980s, but research on the relationship between SRL and foreign language learning is sparse (Zhang & Zhang, 2019). Therefore, the aim with this paper is to remedy these problems. As a result, the goal of this investigation was to ascertain how language teachers enhance students' SRL in foreign language courses with self-assessment and teacher feedback, which are tools for formative assessment. A full discussion of how peer assessment stimulates SRL lies beyond the scope of this study. Throughout this paper, teacher feedback means "the information provided by the teacher concerning aspects of students' understanding and performance in learning" (Guo, 2020, p. 1).

1.1. Self-regulated learning

According to a definition provided by Schunk and Zimmerman (2007, p. vii), SRL refers to “the process by which learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of learning goals.” Monitoring and regulating lie at the heart of SRL, as well as pondering one’s learning goals and whether one has reached them (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Self-regulated learners plan, organize, and assess during the learning process, and they see themselves as autonomous and efficacious (Zimmerman, 1986). Self-regulated learners can also be described as goal-driven (Hadvin et al., 2018), perseverant (Zimmerman, 2002), and motivated (Pintrich et al., 1991). Their academic performance is also stronger compared to students who are not self-regulated (Andrade & Evans, 2013). Also, employing SRL strategies correlates positively with learning outcomes (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). However, as noted by Zimmerman (2002), SRL does not refer to a mental ability or an academic performance skill. Instead, it is considered to be a self-directive process.

Self-regulatory processes are typically perceived to be cyclical with three phases: forethought, performance or volitional control, and self-reflection. Zimmerman (2005, p. 16) conceptualizes these phases as follows:

Forethought refers to influential processes that precede efforts to act and set the stage for it. Performance or volitional control involves processes that occur during motoric efforts and affect attention and action. Self-reflection involves processes that occur after performance efforts and influence a person’s response to that experience. These self-reflections, in turn, influence forethought regarding subsequent motoric efforts—thus completing a self-regulatory cycle.

SRL can be viewed as the highest form of cognitive engagement (Corno & Mandinach, 1983), and SRL is a tremendously important topic in education, as it encapsulates cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects of learning (Panadero, 2017). Moreover, SRL is also a vital skill for the workforce (Lord et al., 2010) and a factor of success in foreign language learning (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Seker, 2016). For example, previous research has shown that SRL strategies contribute to writing proficiency (Sun & Wang, 2020) and reading comprehension (Amini et al., 2020) in foreign language learning. Previous research has indicated that to some extent, teachers enhance SRL (e.g., Ewijk et al., 2013; Perry et al., 2008).

1.2. Feedback

At the heart of efficient pedagogy lies feedback given to students (Higgins, 2014). Feedback amplifies learning (Sadler, 2013; Shute, 2008) because students can adjust their actions to reach their goals (Barkley & Major, 2016); it is an essential resource for guiding students forward (Heritage, 2014). Ideally, feedback should be encouraging, specific, and focused on what is right instead of what is wrong (Higgins, 2014). In addition, feedback should be immediate and elaborate (van der Kleij et al., 2015) as well as succinct (Shute, 2008). Further, useful feedback pinpoints where the student is in their learning and what they need to accomplish in order to reach the next level (Brookhart, 2017). To enhance learning, teachers can also give feedback on drafts before submitting the final version (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Students should not be merely passive recipients of feedback; instead, they should be active in the feedback process (van der Kleij et al., 2019). Feedback should be regarded as a dialogue between the teacher and the student in which the student has an opportunity to discuss the feedback with their teacher (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), thereby adding control of their learning and becoming active in the learning process, which are emphasized in the core curricula (FNBE, 2016; 2019).

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics of efficient feedback, it is important to note that teacher feedback amplifies SRL (Clark, 2012; Hawe & Dixon, 2017; Pereira et al., 2016; Sadler, 2013; Zimmerman, 2013). When teacher feedback addresses the self-regulatory level, in other words the learning process, students can become more engaged with the task (Hattie & Timperley,

2007). Thus, they become active learners, which is a characteristic of a self-regulated learner (Zimmerman, 1986). With feedback, teachers simultaneously foster students' self-efficacy (Smith et al., 2016), which is also a crucial factor in being a self-regulated learner (Mills et al., 2007). Self-efficacy can be characterized as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Moreover, when students receive teacher feedback, they increase their knowledge of their learning and of their skills (Shute, 2008), which is vital for regulatory processes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Students also use teacher feedback to assess their own progress in the self-regulatory cycle (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Teacher feedback amplifies motivation (Dörnyei, 1994, 2020), which plays a crucial role in SRL as students lacking motivation scarcely engage in self-monitoring (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2007). However, the effect of teacher feedback can be negative if it is praise (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) or combined with grades (Lipnevich & Smith, 2009). Moreover, as noted by Andrade and Evans (2013), guidance is an important aspect of SRL. With feedback, teachers should guide their students to take more responsibility for their learning process, thus, students do not constantly rely on teachers. Indeed, teachers should guide students to set goals, select appropriate learning strategies, guide students to assess their progress, and to reflect on what could be improved in the future (Kramarski, 2018). As discussed above, these are salient features of regulatory processes.

1.3. Self-assessment

In this paper, the term self-assessment refers to "assessment activities that require students to examine and understand their own learning" (Bourke, 2018, p. 828). As Boud (2013) underscores, self-assessment does not merely refer to grading one's work. Instead, it means that students should contemplate what good work actually means. When students are self-assessing their work, they reflect on its quality and ponder how it reflects the goals (Andrade, 2014). In the literature, self-evaluation can be used as a synonym of self-assessment even though some researchers have tried to distinguish between them (Boud, 2013).

For learners, self-assessment is a vital skill to have (Panadero et al., 2016a) as students become better learners through self-assessment (Brooks, 2002). Self-assessment is also a focal skill in effective and lifelong learning (Boud, 2013) as well as for taking charge of one's learning, because students cannot rely only on teacher feedback (Andrade, 2014). Moreover, self-assessment generates important information for teachers as students assess aspects that only they are cognizant of (Bourke, 2018). As assessing one's learning is difficult (Bjork et al., 2013), students should receive training in self-assessment, and they should also be given the assessment criteria (Brooks, 2002). Self-assessment should be undertaken during the process of working, not at the end of it (Brooks, 2002), and it should be done regularly (Blanche & Merino, 1989). However, students should not give themselves grades in self-assessment (H. Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009).

Self-assessment is a crucial part of learning (Oscarson, 1989; Ross, 2006; Taras, 2010), and research has generally confirmed that there is a positive relationship between self-assessment and foreign language learning. As reported by Butler and Lee (2010), self-assessment impacts learning and confidence positively among young learners of English, however the effect sizes were small. Regarding speaking performance, Babaii et al. (2016) found that self-assessment increased learners' levels of self-awareness. Liu and Brantmeier (2019), in turn, point out that young learners of English were able to self-assess their foreign language reading and writing abilities accurately. Regarding vocabulary learning, Mican and Cuesta Medina (2017) remark that self-assessment enhances students' oral fluency and vocabulary development.

When students self-assess, they become active learners who monitor their learning (Brooks, 2002). As mentioned above, this is instrumental in SRL. If students lack the capacity to self-assess, they will not move forward in learning, their learning outcomes will not be optimal, and they will not become self-regulated learners (Raaijmakers et al., 2018). In other words, self-assessment is a prerequisite for SRL (Raaijmakers et al., 2018). If students are taught to self-assess, that will

accelerate their SRL (Panadero et al., 2016b). In practice, teachers should provide students with ample opportunities for self-assessment and self-monitoring. When teachers employ structured opportunities for this, students' capacities for SRL can increase (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, it is imperative that teachers give feedback on students' self-assessments, to support their capacity to self-assess (Ross, 2006). Moreover, in order to enhance SRL with self-assessment, teachers should explain the assessment criteria clearly, teach how to use the criteria, and provide sufficient time before submitting the revised version (Panadero et al., 2017). Self-assessment also affects students' self-efficacy, but the impact is larger in girls, and it empowers students; therefore, self-assessment will usually be a valuable practice in every classroom (Panadero et al., 2017). In the Finnish context, employing self-assessment to enhance SRL and life-long learning is emphasized in the core curricula (FNBE, 2016, 2019).

1.4. Research questions

Based on the above discussion on the relationship between self-assessment and feedback in SRL, the aim with this qualitative case study was to discern how teachers enhance SRL in foreign language courses with self-assessment and teacher feedback, which are fundamental components of SRL. The main questions addressed in this paper are: 1) How is self-assessment implemented in foreign language courses? 2) How do teachers provide feedback to students, and how useful do students perceive teacher feedback to be?

2. Methodology

In this section, the participants and data collection are described and the phases of analyzing the data are discussed. Qualitative methods were used in this paper.

2.1. Setting and participants

This study took place in six general upper secondary schools in Finland, most of which are in Southern Finland. These schools can be grouped into average and reputable based on the grade point average (GPA) students need to have to be awarded the basic education certificate. The grading system in Finland ranges from four (failed) to ten (excellent), and eight means good knowledge. For average schools, the GPA was approximately 7.5, and for reputable schools, it was above nine. As the participants came from six schools, this paper can be labelled as a collective case study, in which the focus was to investigate several cases (schools) to explore certain phenomena (self-assessment and teacher feedback practices) (Stake, 2005).

Nine students and ten teachers were interviewed for this study. They had also taken part in previous studies regarding feedback and assessment practices in Finnish general upper secondary education (Mäkipää, 2020; Mäkipää & Hildén, 2021). Nine students were randomly chosen (out of 282 students), and all ten of the teachers who participated in the aforementioned studies were interviewed. These ten teachers have taught some of the students but not all, as they come from several schools. As no study to date has examined SRL in foreign language teaching in Finland from the perspective of formative assessment, interview was chosen as the research method. Interviews are recommended if the topic has not been studied much because it is difficult to estimate the results (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). Table 1 displays background information on the interviewees.

As depicted in Table 1, the background of the students is manifold with respect to course grades, type of school, and language. Regarding the teachers, their background is also varied in language and school. However, all but one of the teachers were experienced.

2.2. Conducting the interviews

The interviews were carried out between January and May 2019, except for Natalie, who was interviewed in September 2019. The participants were interviewed at their schools, and the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interview questions were based on the model of using feedback to enhance SRL by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). Their model includes seven

Table 1. Background information on the interviewees

Students

pseudonym	language	school	previous course grade
Jessica	English	average	7
Jack	English	average	6
Peter	English	reputable	9
Matt	English	average	10
Rachel	Swedish	reputable	7
Will	Swedish	reputable	8
Greg	Swedish	reputable	8
Kate	French	average	10
Angela	French	average	9

Teachers

pseudonym	language	school	teaching experience (years)
Sophia	English	average	20
Anna	English	average	25
Fran	English	reputable	25
Mary	English	reputable	2
Matthew	Swedish	reputable	25
Sean	Swedish	reputable	27
Emma	Swedish	reputable	11
Beatrice	Swedish	average	32
Debra	French	average	15
Natalie	French	reputable	25

Note 1: Language refers to the language based on which the participant answered.

Note 2: Course grades range from four to ten.

principles of good feedback practice, which refers to “anything that might strengthen the students’ capacity to self-regulate their own performance” (p. 205). These practices include: (1) clarifying the nature of good performance, (2) supporting self-assessment, (3) providing high-level feedback information, (4) advocating teacher-peer dialogue, (5) supporting motivation and self-esteem, (6) providing opportunities for closing the gap, and (7) using feedback to enhancing teaching (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 205). Questions were asked of each principle. At the beginning of the interview, the purpose of the study was explained, and how the data will be used. The voluntary nature of taking part in the interview was clarified, and the willingness to participate in the study was also verified. Table 2 shows information on the interviews.

As displayed in Table 2, the teachers’ interviews were somewhat longer than those of the students. A typical student’s interview was approximately 27 minutes and included 3690 words, whereas a typical teacher’s interview was approximately 35 minutes and included 4724 words.

2.3. Data analysis

Adopting the guidelines put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), the data were analyzed using thematic content analysis with Atlas.ti. According to the guidelines, the six phases of this analysis are: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. Using these guidelines, the interviews were analyzed. First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and read five times, simultaneously writing general notes about emergent topics in the data. Second, the

Table 2. Information on the interviews

Student	Length of the interview	word count	Teacher	Length of the interview	word count
Jessica	21:27	3642	Sophia	33:10	4408
Jack	24:35	3252	Anna	34:36	5355
Peter	28:55	3238	Fran	39:06	4796
Matt	39:26	5190	Mary	45:02	5225
Rachel	28:25	4680	Matthew	32:41	4461
Will	24:33	2893	Sean	33:37	4311
Greg	29:14	3539	Emma	31:30	4452
Kate	27:23	3594	Beatrice	29:39	4059
Angela	22:00	3185	Debra	32:33	4288
			Natalie	34:28	5887

Note1: length = mins:secs

data were coded, collating pertinent words, or phrases to each code. In qualitative research, a code means “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). The coding was selective, in other words, only material relevant to the research questions was coded (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Third, relevant themes and topics in the data were searched for, the themes (self-assessment, what kind of feedback students receive, and the usefulness of teacher feedback) were chosen based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) article and the research questions. As a result of the content analysis, several subthemes were created in Atlas.ti. In terms of feedback, they were: mode, type, amount, utility, and motivation. The subthemes related to self-assessment were: amount, teachers’ help, skills, type, utility, and mode. Fourth, the themes and subthemes were introduced to a colleague, after which the coding process and the results were discussed with them to increase the reliability of the study. Fifth, the themes and the subthemes were named. Sixth, compelling excerpts from the data were chosen and the research questions were answered based on the analysis.

In this analysis, both deductive and inductive features were present. The main themes were decided beforehand based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick’s (2006) article. However, the subthemes were not decided beforehand as it was unknown what the participants would mention about the issues.

3. Results

First, the results regarding self-assessment are described. Second, the results regarding teacher feedback practices are presented. The results are also illustrated with excerpts from the data, which have been translated from Finnish to English.

3.1. How self-assessment is used

As for the first research question, all the students were unanimous: teachers had asked them to self-assess their learning. However, the amount of self-assessment varied considerably between the teachers. Jessica, Rachel, and Kate indicated that they had not self-assessed much, whereas Greg pointed out that self-assessment had been used a lot in the courses. Likewise, the form of self-assessment differed between teachers. Seven students reported that they had answered open-ended questions, usually at the end of the course. The students explained that teachers had given them a questionnaire about various topics, such as learning goals, grammar, and course work. The questionnaire was usually online. After completing it, students had sometimes discussed their self-assessments in groups, but this had not taken place often. By way of contrast, Jessica mentioned that their self-assessment had mostly been multiple-choice questions, and Greg said

that they had been asked to give grades for several issues in their self-assessment, such as doing homework or working during the lessons. They also stressed that self-assessment had usually been implemented at the end of the course. Moreover, eight students mentioned that their teachers had not taught how self-assessment should be conducted. Having said that, Kate mentioned that her French teacher had indeed guided the students in self-assessing their learning. However, Greg expressed the belief that teachers did not even need to teach how to self-assess, but in contrast, Rachel emphasized that it definitely should be taught, particularly before moving into general upper secondary education. With regard to the benefits of self-assessment, the students expressed mixed opinions. Seven students found self-assessment to be useful, and particularly Matt and Greg considered self-assessment to be useful as students pondered their goals and how they were learning in relation to the goals. However, Jessica and Peter did not find self-assessment to be useful at all as it had not provided any crucial or additional information on their learning. In fact, Peter stated:

Well, I feel that I don't need a separate piece of paper for knowing what I am doing, because I know myself what I'm doing. Like working at home etc. (Peter, English student)

As this excerpt shows, Peter does not need self-assessment, as he is aware of this learning process without it. In other words, self-assessment does not provide him with any new information.

All the teachers mentioned that they had used self-assessment in their courses. However, the implementation of it differed between the teachers. Natalie, Debra, and Beatrice pointed out that students had self-assessed their work at the end of the course, however, Natalie mentioned that if the students had done a project in the course, they would have self-assessed their work after it. Debra had used self-assessment in the final exam. She also stated that when students who had started to study French in junior high school took the first French course with her, she had used self-assessment to explore the general level of the students. These self-assessments included closed-ended questions about learning and proficiency. Self-assessment had been completed in the form of a questionnaire at the end of Beatrice's courses when she had collected the course feedback. She had not used self-assessment during the courses. Fran highlighted that she had used self-assessment in the middle of the course because to her, it was the most beneficial for students' learning as self-assessment can affect their learning during the rest of the course. Fran explained that in the middle of the course, she had used self-assessment in word tests, in which she had asked questions about what students had learnt so far, and how they had worked. At the end of the course, students had pondered all the feedback they had received during the course, and how they had moved forward in the learning process. In contrast, Sophia and Anna stated that they had sometimes used self-assessment, and they had used the self-assessments of the course book. These self-assessments were either open-ended or closed-ended questions, and they focused on strengths and weaknesses and what students should improve. Mary had mostly used self-assessment for assessing whether the text of the course book was understandable and how students had perceived peer feedback on essays. These self-assessments were conducted orally. In the speaking course, she had used self-assessment for determining the skills and areas in which students had wanted to improve. She also stressed that teachers could not use self-assessment too often as that might irritate students. Similarly, Matthew mentioned that some students had been annoyed if there had been too much self-assessment. He also pointed out that one course (lasting about six weeks) was too short to assess students by using varied assessment practices. He stressed that there should be ample time for teaching and repetition, not only for self-assessment. Sean explained that when a course had started, he had used a questionnaire in which students had contemplated how they should work during the course, and what their learning goals would be. At the end of the course, students had completed another questionnaire and assessed their course work and whether they had been able to reach the learning goals. In Emma's courses, self-assessment was mostly a questionnaire after projects. In terms of time, Emma, Anna, Beatrice, and Sean

mentioned that they had not used self-assessment much, mostly due to a lack of time. Emma explained:

Well once again, it's done more in basic education. It all comes down to time: there are so few lessons and for instance, in this period we had Easter and Labor Day and Ascension Day and then we had special days, and when I looked at my timetable, I noticed that I lost five lessons to bank holidays. The remaining time after it is so limited, so I don't have time for self-assessment after going through the textbook and doing the mandatory things. I'm not saying that self-assessment isn't important, but when the exam week is approaching, and I must go through the book and teach the grammar issues, so self-assessment isn't used much unfortunately. (Emma, Swedish teacher)

Here, Emma mentions the importance of self-assessment but simultaneously, she underscores that in the limited time available in the course, there is not enough time for self-assessment.

Regarding teaching how to self-assess, five teachers had taught it explicitly, whereas others had not taught it at all. Natalie explained that there had not been time for it, and she had preferred to use the limited time available for teaching French, not self-assessment. Also, Anna pointed out this lack of time for self-assessment. By way of contrast, Sophia noted that it had been extremely helpful to teach these skills, particularly to younger students. She pointed out:

Particularly younger students could be helped as they usually think that they are not good at anything. Then I say, "think again." If the task doesn't give any clues of what issues the student could reflect on, then you should definitely say that there are these areas in this exercise. You could reflect on them. (Sophia, English teacher)

This excerpt illustrates how teachers can help students to self-assess. Sophia notes that teachers can point out the specific focus areas of the tasks and ask students to reflect on them.

When asked how students self-assessed their learning, a range of responses was elicited in the students' answers. Students had compared their learning to the goals of the course, they had contemplated their learning in general, they had pondered what new issues they had learnt during the course, they had compared their learning to that of their friends, and they had contemplated the goals of the core curriculum. Students primarily mentioned only one or two issues, but Rachel seemed to reflect on several issues in self-assessment. She mentioned:

Well, I guess I compare myself to my friends, and I also consider the core curriculum. Of course, it depends on whether I have just learnt the issue or a bit earlier. So, I compare with my friends and to my level of knowledge before learning the new issue, so if I knew anything about it or not. (Rachel, Swedish student)

Here, Rachel lists all the issues that she uses in self-assessment. Put differently, she self-assesses her work and learning from several perspectives.

3.2. Skills for self-assessment

Students were confident that they were capable of self-assessing their learning, as only Jessica mentioned that it had been challenging to self-assess their learning. When asked if students were aware of the assessment criteria for the course grade and other assessed work during the course, six students mentioned that they had understood and had been aware of them. However, Greg pointed out that the criteria seemed incomprehensible and unconnected. He also mentioned that the teachers had not explained the criteria clearly. Likewise, Jessica stressed that the criteria had scarcely been explained, and Rachel did not always understand the criteria. Greg discussed the criteria regarding essays:

Some examples could be useful for illustrating the proficiency levels. The list of criteria seems distant somehow. I don't know how I assess my text with the criteria. (Greg, Swedish student)

As this excerpt illustrates, not all students find the criteria understandable. Consequently, students are unaware of how to use them in self-assessment.

When asked about the assessment criteria, seven teachers mentioned that they had presented the criteria when the course started. They had also presented the criteria for projects and written work. Seven teachers also felt that students had understood the criteria. Nevertheless, Mary and Sophia said that some students had understood them, while others had not. Sophia commented:

I think it's the same thing as with understanding feedback in general. I feel that some students understand where they are in their learning process and what they need to improve to get the higher grade, but I feel that everyone does not completely understand it even if I explain it. (Sophia, English teacher)

Here, Sophia points out that assessment criteria and feedback in general are fuzzy to some students. However, even if she explains the criteria to students, they still do not necessarily understand them. Similarly, Beatrice pondered whether students had not necessarily understood the criteria in Swedish courses, as they might think that one gets a high grade if one does not make any errors. Fran mentioned that she was not sure if students cared about the criteria. They were usually more interested in knowing how the work is done.

3.3. Focus of teacher feedback

As for the second research question, all the students mentioned that teachers had given feedback on errors. Most teachers had merely underlined the errors but had not corrected them. Six students pointed out that they had gone through the errors but had not necessarily corrected them. Teachers had also given feedback on how to improve the work. Regarding the mode of the feedback, all the students said that teachers had not asked how their students would like to receive feedback. Instead, teachers had decided it on their own. In addition, it seems a lack of oral feedback is prevalent in foreign language courses, as five students emphasized that teachers had primarily given written feedback. Greg and Rachel mentioned:

I don't remember receiving oral feedback for a long time. Oh yes, on homework if I have written something on the board. (Greg, Swedish student)

In my opinion, we don't get much oral feedback. If I answer incorrectly, the teacher corrects it, but we don't get much feedback orally. It's mostly written feedback in essays and exams. (Rachel, Swedish student)

These excerpts illustrate clearly that teachers have not provided students with oral feedback. Teachers might comment on mistakes, but oral feedback is lacking in general.

Concerning feedback on drafts, all the students pointed out that they had not received feedback on drafts. What this means is they had only received feedback on the final version. Five students mentioned that teachers of mother tongue and literature had given feedback on drafts and the students considered it to be an efficient practice for learning. All the students highlighted that this practice would also be useful in foreign language courses. Nevertheless, Matt speculated that it would not necessarily be realistic. He contemplated:

It's a good idea that you first write something, then you submit it, you get it back with suggestions on what to correct, add and remove. Then you polish it. Of course, that would be wonderful but once again, it all comes down to the fact that it's really strenuous if the teacher has a group of 30 students. And if the teacher gives feedback five times for each piece of work for each student, well then, the workload multiplies. It would be a great system with the right kind of interaction between a teacher and a student. That would be a positive thing but whether that's realistic, I don't know. (Matt, English student)

Matt contemplates here that feedback on drafts would help learners considerably. He also points out the interactive nature in delivering feedback between a student and a teacher. Put differently, he understands the core meaning of feedback as a dialogue. Moreover, he understands the limits that courses with several students include.

As for the type of feedback, the teachers mentioned that they had given feedback on pronunciation and how to improve the work. They had also given much feedback during the lessons. Moreover, the teachers mentioned that they had given feedback on errors, but they mentioned different practices for it. Fran had not corrected the errors, instead, she had written suggestions and tips on how to correct the error. Anna and Mary noted that they had corrected the errors. Matthew, in turn, said that it had depended on the function of the task if he had corrected the errors or not. Debra said that she had corrected the errors, but it would be better if she only marked the errors and students corrected them, but that would be too time-consuming. Equally, Natalie pointed out the lack of time and mentioned that students were not capable of correcting the errors on their own. She reflected on why she corrects the errors:

I correct. They can't correct them. I have sometimes tried that I have simply underlined the errors and they have tried to correct them in the lesson, and they had had the opportunity to ask me for help. Well, some students were able to do it but then you face the time issue. Courses are so bloody full of stuff. You want to go through the issues thoroughly and not hastily. Being a teacher is prioritizing things. You could do anything useful, but you must make choices and then I decided that this takes too much time and it's better if I correct the errors understandably and then sometimes, we try to correct the errors in the lesson. Particularly in the later courses we do that so that I see them correct the errors and then ask if they don't understand. (Natalie, French teacher)

Here, Natalie discusses trying to make the students correct their own mistakes, but all the students are not capable of correcting them. She points out the time-issue: courses are filled with several learning outcomes and topics that self-correction is too time-consuming.

In terms of drafts, eight teachers pointed out that they had not given feedback on drafts. They mentioned that it would be beneficial for the students' learning process, but they did not have enough time for this practice, particularly due to the substantial number of students in each course. Natalie mentioned that she used to give feedback on drafts, but she stopped that as it was too laborious. However, Matthew mentioned that he had used several online platforms to give feedback on drafts.

Concerning the mode of the feedback, all the teachers mentioned that they had decided themselves how they give feedback to students. Nevertheless, Fran mentioned that in the later English courses the students could decide whether she corrects the errors or simply marks them and gives tips on how to correct them. Anna said that when a course had started, she had asked who would like to receive more detailed feedback, and she had provided them with it. Beatrice mentioned that in the future, she could try to ask her students how they would like to receive feedback.

3.4. Amount and utility of teacher feedback

Five students felt that they had not received enough feedback, but Matt, Peter, Will, and Greg said that the amount of teacher feedback had been enough. Students exhibited contradictory opinions on face-to-face feedback. Six students wanted to receive feedback face to face, for instance, in the corridor, but Peter and Greg mentioned that they had no need for that kind of feedback. Likewise, Jack mentioned that being alone with the teacher would be awkward. According to the students, teachers had not given face to face feedback, but they were sure that if someone had wanted to receive that kind of feedback, teachers would have been more than happy to provide it. Differences between teachers could be detected as some teachers had provided more profound and tangible feedback than others.

Matt discussed his perceptions of teacher feedback:

Well, we get a lot of feedback. If you write an essay, then you get it back, and all the errors are marked and there might be something encouraging at the end, something that you have done right and maybe also constructive criticism on what you could have done even better. I feel that I have received enough feedback, but there could always be more as I like it. I like that particularly in English courses, I could improve my skills in every possible way. There could always be more feedback but whether that is realistic is a completely different question. (Matt, English student)

Here, Matt indicates that he appreciates teacher feedback and that he has received enough feedback although he admits that there could also be more of it. However, he problematizes the notion of giving feedback as he speculates on whether it would be realistic for teachers to provide students with more feedback. He understands that writing feedback is time-consuming for teachers.

Eight students believed that teacher feedback had been useful for them in several ways, such as their proficiency had improved, they had received information on how they were working related to the goals, and they had improved their writing abilities. Nevertheless, Jack pointed out that he was not interested in reading teacher feedback as only grades interested him. However, he admitted that it could be useful to read the teachers' comments. The students mentioned several characteristics of efficient teacher feedback that advances learning, such as teachers underlining the mistakes and students correcting them. Jessica emphasized that students would not then overlook the corrections, which might happen if teachers corrected everything. Another useful tool is feedback on the content of the work, in other words, feedback that focuses on the work as a whole, not merely on the errors. Jack highlighted that the teachers had also given feedback on the content, but they had usually focused on errors. He stated that the feedback could focus more on the actual content. Students also mentioned that feedback containing information on where to find extra material would be useful. Rachel clarified that this would benefit the students particularly in situations in which they needed to correct major grammar errors. Lastly, students mentioned critical feedback: students did not want to receive only praise and compliments. Will pointed out that critical feedback would develop one's skills and proficiency. He also stated that not all teachers had given critical feedback.

Six teachers considered their feedback to be useful for students. All the teachers emphasized that encouraging students to ask the teacher if problems occur was a suitable practice, although only a few students took advantage of this. Sophia explained that face-to-face feedback had boosted students' progress, as they could ask questions and interact with the teacher. Yet, this practice was time-consuming. According to seven teachers, another way of boosting students' progress is praise and encouragement, particularly to weaker students. Nevertheless, Emma maintained that some weaker students had only been interested in passing the course, not actually learning anything, and any amount of praise would not affect that. The teachers also pointed out the importance of giving feedback on the content, not only on the language. Emma underscored that it was important to verbalize for the student how they covered the topic, whether the text was diverse, what the strengths and weaknesses were, and what the grade was based on. Despite these benefits for learning, Sophia and Anna pointed out that mostly 12th year students had been extremely interested in the feedback they receive as they are preparing for the matriculation examination. In contrast, 10th and 11th year students had focused on the grades, not on the feedback, even though some exceptions came to their minds. Moreover, Debra felt that she had often written feedback on the same issues for some students, and they still made the same mistakes. She wondered if students had read the feedback thoroughly or acted on it.

3.5. Effect of teacher feedback on motivation

Whether teacher feedback had affected students' motivation in English, Swedish and French courses, it turned out that according to seven students, it had not affected motivation at all. Peter and Greg expressed the belief that teacher feedback could not affect motivation in any situation, whereas Jessica remarked that if she had received more feedback and particularly encouraging feedback, that could have affected her motivation in English. By the same token, Kate commented that praise could have affected her motivation to study French. Nevertheless, Matt and Angela pointed out that teacher feedback had increased their motivation to English and French. Matt discussed how feedback affects his motivation:

I would say that feedback affects things a great deal. It motivates me to do better if the teachers mark the errors in an essay and I'm not satisfied with the scoring. Also, if I get a very good grade and I have succeeded, and I have noticed that I have done correctly, and the teacher agrees with that and says it, well of course then I think that I must do similarly in the future. And of course, it motivates me when I know that I have the skills to do beautiful things. So, I'd say that any type of feedback in every form motivates me to learn more. (Matt, English student)

As this excerpt illustrates, Matt finds teacher feedback motivating in every form. Also, teacher feedback makes him appreciate his English skills.

Nine teachers believed that their feedback had probably motivated students, but they felt that the effects had most likely been minor. Anna underscored that feedback should always include praise and something positive, thereby enhancing students' self-esteem, and Mary mentioned that the effect had been noticeable especially in oral tasks and presentations. However, Debra was not sure if her feedback practices had motivated students, but she assumed that she had not demotivated her students. Natalie commented:

I have and I actually know for a fact because it has been mentioned in the course feedback. They can of course write whatever they want so I'm not gullible in any way as they know that the teacher reads the feedback but on the other hand, no-one forces them to write that. Many students have said in their feedback that there is a positive atmosphere in the classroom, and I spur them to work, and I give positive feedback. I guess that has spurred many students to choose more French courses, which they wouldn't have done otherwise. (Natalie, French teacher)

Here, Natalie points out that she managed to create a positive learning atmosphere with her teaching and feedback practices. The students have appreciated that and consequently chosen more French courses.

3.6. Main results

The main results of this paper can be summarized as follows: (1) self-assessment is used in language courses, but teachers implement it in several ways; (2) teachers do not guide students in self-assessment; (3) teachers mainly give written feedback, and oral feedback is lacking, which contradicts the teachers who say that they give a lot of feedback in the lessons, (4) teachers and students exhibit contradictory perceptions regarding the effects of feedback on student motivation, (5) to some extent, teachers enhance students' SRL, but there is room for improvement.

4. Discussion

This case study set out to examine how foreign language teachers enhance their students' SRL with self-assessment and feedback in Finnish general upper secondary schools. The first research question asked how self-assessment is implemented in foreign language courses. As explained in the literature review, self-assessment is a vital part of being self-regulated (Raaijmakers et al., 2018), and it is also highlighted in the core curricula (FNBE, 2016; 2019). If teachers provide students with ample and structured opportunities for self-assessment and self-monitoring,

teachers develop students' capacities for SRL (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). As all the teachers and students commented that self-assessment is used in the courses, mostly by employing online questionnaires, it can be concluded that teachers' foster SRL with self-assessment. However, this enhancement is only partial as not all the teachers teach students how to conduct self-assessment even though teachers should support students in it (Brooks, 2002). Some teachers and students pointed out that self-assessment is executed at the end of the course even though self-assessment is more beneficial in the middle of the learning process (Brooks, 2002). If self-assessment is conducted at the end of the course, students cannot use their self-assessments to submit revised versions of their work, which would enhance SRL (Panadero et al., 2017). These results contradict the recommendations put forth by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). Based on the study at hand, it can be deduced that the teachers' contributions of self-assessment in enhancing SRL are sparse; opportunities for self-assessment are scarce, not all students have received training for conducting self-assessments, and no-one mentioned that teachers give feedback on students' self-assessments or that students use self-assessment to improve their work. However, it is imperative to bear in mind that some teachers have indeed taught how to self-assess and have employed self-assessment continuously during the course. Moreover, some students said that they had not found self-assessment to be helpful and had not understood the assessment criteria. As self-assessment stimulates SRL (Panadero et al., 2016b), teachers should critically examine their self-assessment practices: when they use it, how they use it, and whether they instruct students how to do it. Further, some teachers mentioned that they do not use self-assessment much due to time issues. Consequently, teachers should critically assess whether they acknowledge the role of self-assessment in learning, and whether they should somehow refine the content of their courses to implement more self-assessment practices.

The second research question focused on how teachers give feedback to students and whether students perceive teacher feedback to be useful. The results suggest that teachers give feedback particularly on errors and improvement, but the students reported a lack of feedback, especially concerning oral feedback. Research has also stressed this lack of feedback in Finnish schools (Atjonen et al., 2019; Mäkipää & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2019). Students' perceptions differ significantly from those of the teachers as they pointed out that they had given a lot of oral feedback during the lessons. This raises the inevitable question of why students do not notice teacher feedback in the lessons. One explanation might be the form as oral feedback is less visible and tangible than written feedback. Additionally, teachers tend to choose the mode of the feedback themselves and give feedback only on the final version, not on drafts. As using drafts affects learning positively (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), teachers need to consider the use of drafts in teaching writing. This could yield positive results for students' self-regulatory processes, particularly if teachers implement self-assessment prior to submitting the new version. Moreover, the feedback tends to focus on errors, which contradicts the recommendations put forward by Hattie and Timperley (2007) who argue that feedback is most beneficial when it is targeted at the self-regulation level, and by Higgins (2014) who asserts that feedback should not focus on errors. Consequently, teachers need to reflect on their feedback practices and whether they take students' self-regulatory processes into consideration in their feedback. As SRL is the goal of learning (FNBE, 2016; 2019; Bandura, 1993) it is of the utmost importance to target feedback at the self-regulation level.

Most participants felt that teacher feedback had been useful for students, but some teachers mentioned that older students had been more interested in it due to the matriculation examination. Feedback on the content of the work was particularly mentioned as being useful, in addition to praise and underlining errors. As for motivation, the perceptions were mixed: students primarily did not see teacher feedback as motivating them, while teachers mainly exhibited the opposite view. Some students even argued that feedback cannot impact motivation at all. However, as feedback is indeed a source of motivation (Dörnyei, 1994, 2020), one wonders why the students were strongly against it. The reason might be in the content of the feedback. As noted by Dörnyei (1994), motivating feedback should be informational rather than controlling, and not error-focused. As the students mentioned that teachers' written feedback is mostly on errors, one

could speculate whether this could even demotivate or discourage students. Evidence from previous research suggests that Finnish students particularly want to receive feedback on how to improve their work (Mäkipää & Hildén, 2019). Therefore, it is vital that teachers examine the relationship between errors and improvement in their feedback practices. If teachers manage to include the motivational factor in their feedback, it becomes more useful for students.

This study has successfully demonstrated that foreign language teachers enhance SRL to a certain extent, which corroborates the findings of Ewijk et al. (2013) and Perry et al. (2008). That said, some limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The major limitation of this study lies in the fact that being merely a case study, the generalization of the results is limited, as well as the representativeness of the participants. Therefore, subsequent studies should use random sampling, and those studies could compare and contrast with this study. The number of participants was quite small, which is often the case in qualitative research. The sample was not nationally representative as most participants came from Southern Finland. Regarding the teachers, most were experienced. It is also vital to bear in mind that the actual effect of self-assessment and teacher feedback on SRL was not measured. Instead, the focus was on exploring students' and teachers' perceptions on the issue. Despite these limitations, this study extends our knowledge of SRL in foreign language teaching in Finland and provides teachers with tangible implications for assessing their work.

The findings from this study provide several theoretical and practical contributions to the field of foreign language teaching. First, the use of self-assessment in foreign language teaching varies between teachers, as well as the timing of self-assessment. In relation to teaching self-assessment skills, only five teachers reported teaching them. These results give cause for concern, as self-assessment advances SRL (Panadero et al., 2017) and foreign language learning (Babaii et al., 2016). Thus, it can be deduced that the implementation of self-assessment in foreign language teaching in Finland is less efficacious than it could be. Second, another focal issue related to self-assessment is the fact that students need more training in it, which could subsequently enhance their SRL. As some students found self-assessment to be useless and not all teachers provided students with training, training would be of the utmost importance. This might even increase students' proficiency in a given language. As self-assessment can be considered to be a distinct strategy to enhance SRL, training in it is crucial. Third, students' perceptions of the motivational factor of feedback contradict teachers' perceptions. In a nutshell, teachers find their feedback to be more motivating than students do. Motivation plays a key role in SRL (Panadero, 2017). Therefore, the lack of motivational factors in teacher feedback poses a threat to students: if they do not consider teacher feedback to be motivating, it is challenging for teachers to enhance SRL with feedback. In essence, the motivational aspect of teacher feedback in practice remains undefined. Fourth, teachers tend to focus on written feedback in teaching, suggesting that oral feedback is not as widespread. What is interesting is that students' and teachers' perceptions contradict each other, as teachers claim to give a lot of oral feedback, while students claim not to have received it. This finding accentuates the diverse nature of oral feedback as it is often less tangible than written feedback. Basically, this implies that students might overlook oral feedback. What this means is that the role of oral feedback should be made more explicit in the foreign language classroom.

The contributions made here have wide applicability for teacher education and in-service training. As mentioned in the introduction, many university students in Finland are not self-regulated learners. This is alarming: if student teachers are not self-regulated learners, one wonders how they will later enhance their students' SRL. This suggests that the significance of SRL should be stressed more in teacher education, which is also underscored by Dignath and Büttner (2008). Future teachers will be better equipped to enhance SRL, and future students will be able to regulate their learning better and be aware of their learning process. Moreover, earlier research established that Finnish teachers need more training in assessment (Atjonen et al., 2019; Härmälä et al., 2019), particularly regarding how to use assessment practices for accelerating the learning

process (Atjonen et al., 2019). As feedback on the learning process helps students to become self-regulated learners, the culminations of in-service training should be how to use efficient assessment practices to foster SRL.

Further research regarding the role of SRL strategies would be worthwhile, as well as a longitudinal study investigating how students' self-regulatory skills improve during the years in general upper secondary school. Additionally, more research is needed to study novice teachers' perceptions of SRL, as most teachers in this study were experienced.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical Approval

Ethical guidelines were followed meticulously in this study. In Finland, national regulations state that ethical approval is needed if informed consent is not collected, the researcher intervenes in the physical integrity of the participants, minors under the age of 15 are studied without consent from parents or carers, the participants are exposed to strong stimuli, the research involves a risk of mental harm, or the research could cause a safety threat. These do not apply to the present study. Thus, ethical approval was not sought.

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